

A HISTORY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHAPEL
ORGANIZATIONS IN THE ARMY
SINCE 1942

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A Research Paper
Prepared for G22-B-19

Fort Hamilton
The United States Army Chaplain Center and School
3 December 1973

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to trace the development of Protestant chapel organizations in the United States Army since 1942. It will explore the organization, purposes, program and growth of the major organizations which are: the Service Men's Christian League, the United Fellowship of Protestants and the Protestant Men of the Chapel.

I. SERVICE MEN'S CHRISTIAN LEAGUE

Organization

On 11 November 1942, the Service Men's Christian League came into being, largely due to the efforts of the General Commission on Army and Navy Chaplains. It was an inclusive Protestant organization for men in the Army and Navy, which served "as an instrumentality of influence for the chaplain much as the young people's society of a local church serves the pastor."¹ This organization was the result of a proposal presented at the General Commission's 10 June 1942 meeting. At this meeting a plan for the League was presented. Sponsoring agencies for the organization were the General Commission on Army and Navy Chaplains, the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, the International Council of Religious Education and the World's Christian Endeavor Union. It was estimated that the sponsoring agencies represented 90 per cent of the Protestant churches in America.²

Bishop Adna W. Leonard, Chairman of the General Commission,

¹General Commission on Army and Navy Chaplains, "Report of the Director, General Commission, Quarter ending November 30, 1942," Philadelphia, 1942, p. 3. (Mimeographed.)

²Edward A. Simon, "The Influence of the American Protestant Churches on the Development of the Structure and Duties of the Army Chaplaincy, 1914-1962" (unpublished Masters Thesis, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1963), pp. 90-91.

had a major part in the planning and has been called the father of the League. A great act of magnanimity occurred at this point, Dr. Daniel A. Poling, President of the World's Christian Endeavor Union, which was already active with the armed forces, threw the full weight of this society behind the new organization.³

Purposes

From its inception the League stressed that it was a subordinate agency to help the chaplain in his work. The founders adopted the following statement of purpose:

1. To offer to the chaplain of the armed forces a program for men on active duty, which may be used at their discretion.
2. To provide a means of Christian fellowship, devotion, evangelism, and education for the purpose of fortifying the serviceman's Christian life.
3. To assist the man in service in maintaining his church affiliation and to prepare him for Christian citizenship in his community, nation, and world when he returns to civil life.
4. To provide for the chaplains and the men in the armed services such helps--devotional, evangelistic, educational, and organizational--as may be required to enable the Service Men's Christian League to fulfill its ministry for Christ.⁴

In planning the qualifications for membership, the organizers of the League found themselves in a dilemma. A statement so general that could include the liberal groups would seem meaningless to some of the stricter bodies. A compromise statement would not have satisfied the extremes of the right or the

³Roy J. Honeywell, Chaplains of the United States Army (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1958), p. 240.

⁴Ibid.

left, and many chaplains and civilian leaders would have felt that the League did not stand for enough to merit vigorous support. In this situation it was agreed that two types of membership would be offered.⁵ Active members were men who accepted Christ as Savior. Associate members were men who had not fully and finally chosen Christ as Savior. The League was primarily a fellowship of Protestant men in the service, united to sustain each other in the Christian way of life and to bring others to accept Jesus Christ as Savior.⁶

Program

The program included a guidance manual for chaplains to organize local units, a monthly periodical to provide topics and materials for Sunday school and general discussion groups, promotional leaflets to set forth the purposes of the League, and membership cards which would carry the League Covenant. A budget of \$130,000.00 was set for the first twenty months operation.⁷

One of the first projects undertaken by the League was the publication of The Link, a monthly periodical for League members and other servicemen. It was first issued in January-February, 1943, with 50,000 copies printed. The circulation

⁵Ibid.

⁶"Designed...Launched...Steaming Into Action," The Link, I, No. 1 (January-February, 1943), 11-12.

⁷Spencer D. McQueen, "A Half-Century in Behalf of the Chaplaincy," The Chaplain, XXIV, No. 3 (May-June, 1967), 23.

reached 5,000,000 copies during 1945. The Link combined religious, instructive, and news articles to make a broad cultural appeal to the young men in uniform. The Link provided the backbone for the League programs with its educational materials. Discussion materials were included in the magazine for the League meetings and these programs aided young servicemen find answers to their questions on faith and belief.⁸

The activities of the League units centered on group meetings with programs carefully prepared and with emphasis on worship and individual participation. The program and organization of the League was flexible and could be adapted by the chaplain to serve his particular needs.⁹

Growth

A few chaplains felt that the League program in their units demanded too much of their time and effort, but the great majority looked upon the organization as a help in accomplishing their work. In some places local units of the League kept religious interest active during periods when the installation had no chaplain. By the end of 1944 over 2,000 units of the League were active, but with the close of World War II and reduction of the armed forces the Service Men's Christian League decreased in activity.¹⁰

⁸Simon, "Army Chaplaincy," p. 91.

⁹Clarence W. Hall, "The Soapbox," The Link, I, No. 1 (January-February, 1943), 34-35.

¹⁰Honeywell, Chaplains, pp. 241-242.

II. UNITED FELLOWSHIP OF PROTESTANTS

Organization

The foundation for the United Fellowship of Protestants was laid at the 20 April 1950 meeting of the General Commission on Chaplains. The Commission adopted the following recommendations concerning the United Fellowship of Protestants: (1) the basic purposes of the Service Men's Christian League be continued, (2) the name be changed, (3) the organization be integrally related to the United Christian Youth Movement, (4) the organization be related administratively to the General Commission and associated with the United Christian Youth Movement, (5) The Link be continued as the program manual and (6) 1 January 1951 be the starting date for the program.¹¹

In addition to the recommendations above there came requests from Christian youth in the armed forces and chaplains for an organization similar to the Service Men's Christian League. They requested: (1) to meet in small groups with an intimate fellowship of Christian youth, (2) the program be a continuation of the experiences they had had in young peoples societies in home churches, (3) the organization be coeducational and (4) that stress be placed on self-expression as well as Christian

¹¹"Meeting of the General Commission on Chaplains," The Chaplain, VII, No. 4 (July-August, 1950), 9-10.

fellowship.¹²

The Korean War prompted many Protestant churches to become as interested in ministering to the young servicemen as the Service Men's Christian League had done during World War II. In the spring of 1951, the plan for a youth fellowship for all Protestant servicemen gained the wholehearted support of the member denominations of the General Commission and various councils of churches. The Fellowship was declared to be "one of the greatest spiritual opportunities of our generation."¹³

Purposes

The United Fellowship of Protestants did not stress a formal organization. It was a fellowship wherever young men and women gathered with their chaplain for worship, study, prayer, social activities and service projects.¹⁴ The purposes were basically those stated for the Service Men's Christian League with less emphasis on organizational structures.

Program

The Fellowship had a three step program of action:

1. Cards of introduction from the home church to the chaplain were filled out by the pastor and given to

¹²Thomas A. Rymer, "United Fellowship of Protestants," The Link, IX, No. 3 (June-July, 1951), 5-6.

¹³Steward M. Robinson, "The Biannual Meeting of the General Commission on Chaplains," The Chaplain, VII, No. 1 (January-February, 1951), 26.

¹⁴A. Wilson Cheek, "Introducing--Jim and the United Fellowship of Protestants," The Link, IX, No. 5 (October-November, 1951), 7-9.

the new servicemen to present to his chaplain.

2. Chaplains were to form units of United Fellowship of Protestants in their organizations and at their posts.

3. Churches near military installations were to arrange attractive and interesting programs and facilities for the servicemen on their off-duty hours.¹⁵

Growth

As the armed forces built up for the Korean War new Fellowship units were formed and flourished. In addition to the programs and activities of the Fellowship units an increased interest was directed toward the fellowship aspect of the United Fellowship of Protestants to provide a Christian emphasis upon the use of leisure time. At the same time, the churches at home began to express a growing concern for a more wholesome atmosphere in the areas surrounding the military installations of the Far East. To meet this need Christian Service Centers were opened to provide opportunities for American personnel to meet a better class of citizens in these foreign lands. The response of the churches was to subscribe to a budget of \$30,000.00 for 1955 and \$45,000.00 for 1956 in tangible support of these worthy projects.¹⁶

Another outgrowth of the United Fellowship of Protestants groups were family Fellowship groups. These groups included young servicemen as well as families and participated in such activities as trips, picnics, discussion groups, Bible studies

¹⁵Fred C. Reynolds, "Programs of Fellowship," The Chaplain, VIII, No. 5 (September-October, 1951), 7-9.

¹⁶McQueen, "Half-Century Chaplaincy," p. 25.

and support of missionaries. During the early part of 1955 interest in the Fellowship groups diminished. The groups were replaced by the military operated Men of the Chapel movement.¹⁷

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 26.

III. PROTESTANT MEN OF THE CHAPEL

Organization

The Protestant Men of the Chapel movement received its start in Europe in 1954. Under the leadership of one of its founders, Chaplain Edwin L. Kirtley, the movement grew rapidly.¹⁸ It was the next logical step in the development of unified Protestant activities and marked a major development relating the church and the chaplain to each other. Through the influence of Army chaplains the movement was started, Protestant churches and church agencies were asked to assist rather than direct, which had not been the case with the Service Men's Christian League and the United Fellowship of Protestants.¹⁹

Purposes

The Protestant Men of the Chapel movement was designed to be more than a fellowship activity. It was to be rather a "joint effort of laymen and chaplains from various denominations getting together to carry out the basic objectives they have as Christian men."²⁰

¹⁸ Lawrence P. Fitzgerald, "Christianity as a Laymen's Religion," The Chaplain, XVII, No. 2 (April, 1960), 20-21.

¹⁹ Simon, "Army Chaplaincy," p. 135.

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 135-136.

The aims of the Protestant Men of the Chapel are to:

1. Lead men to accept Christ as Savior and Lord.
2. Teach men the history, the aims, the beliefs, and the program of the Church - all built on a solid foundation of Worship and Bible study.
3. Develop men in the skills of prayer, evangelism, friendshipness, stewardship, teaching, and social service - against a background of personal spiritual development.
4. Engage men in the work of the chapel in keeping with their abilities, interests, and time schedules.²¹

Program

The program grew out of the need for Christian impact on military life. The program sought to: (1) give men a new sense of belonging, (2) be a working fellowship with Christ, (3) be a fellowship with like minded men and (4) be a creative partnership with chaplains to promote chapel programs and lay leadership.²² Other aspects of the program included: teaching Sunday school, ushering, leading youth groups and singing in choirs. In addition, local chapters sponsored programs with speakers, special projects to recruit new members, and the sponsorship of local orphanages or other institutions.²³

²¹ Armed Forces Chaplain's Board, Protestant Men of the Chapel Program Resources Guide, 1963 (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1963), p. 1.

²² James S. Griffes, "We Need Men of the Chapel," The Chaplain, XIV, No. 4 (August, 1957), 3-5.

²³ Margaret Frakes, "PMOC of USAREUR," The Christian Century, LXXVI, No. 13 (April, 1959), 393-394.

Growth

By October 1958, 122 chapters had been formed in the 180 chapels in Europe. This growth can be attributed to the annual spring area rallies and the annual fall leadership workshops held in Berchtesgaden, Germany, in addition to strong laymen and chaplain leadership.²⁴

The movement also grew as individuals who had participated in its activities in Europe introduced the movement into the United States upon their return from Europe. The Chief of Chaplain's Office conducted an informal study of the movement in 1959 to seek the positive aspects and potential problem areas. Since leadership would determine the direction the organization would take, it was proposed that the Chief of Chaplains take the initiative to guide the movement into useful and effective channels throughout the Army. In light of these considerations, the Chief of Chaplains, writing in the monthly circular letter of his Office, characterized the Protestant Men of the Chapel as not a national organization, but a movement to urge officers and noncommissioned officers to take a more active part in the chapel programs. In April 1960 a further study was made by the Chief of Chaplain's Office. The results of this study encouraged coordination

²⁴Ibid.

with the Navy and Air Force Chiefs of Chaplains to expand the program.²⁵

Soon after the protestant Men of the Chapel movement started, similar organizations were founded for the women and youth of the chapel. These movements are still very active in most Army, Navy and Air Force chapel programs throughout the world.²⁶

²⁵Office of the Chief of Chaplains, Department of the Army, Summary of Major Events and Problems 1 July 1959 to 30 June 1960 (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1960), pp. 121-126.

²⁶Griffes, "We Need Men of the Chapel," p. 3.

CONCLUSION

This paper has traced the development of chapel organizations in the United States Army since 1942. The first two movements relied heavily on the direction of the General Commission on Chaplains and other civilian church agencies. In the latest chapel organization, the Protestant Men of the Chapel, the emphasis shifted to the military for direction. In addition to the common purposes of bringing men to Christ, all of the movements have depended on chaplains for the in-service guidance and leadership. It is apparent that the three movements outlined in this study have made great contributions to men in uniform.

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